

Congresswoman barred from Vietnam while conducting security, human trafficking tour of Southeast Asia

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (CA-47), Co-Chair of the Congressional Caucus on Vietnam, today announced that her visa application was ignored by Vietnam's government. Rep. Sanchez, who just concluded a Congressional Delegation visit throughout critical parts of Southeast Asia, had hoped to meet with Vietnamese human rights activists and other officials during her trip. Rep. Sanchez has been blocked from visiting the Communist country multiple times during her time in Congress.

"I am extremely disappointed that Vietnam's government decided to ignore my visa application," said Rep. Sanchez, who represents the largest Vietnamese community outside of Vietnam. "For years, Vietnam has promised to expand the civil, political, and religious liberties of its people in exchange for a greater role in international politics. I strongly believe that elected officials from America and other democracies should have the opportunity to assess Vietnam's progress, or lack thereof, on these issues firsthand.

"Vietnam's actions today speak volumes about its stated, but disregarded, commitment to improve transparency and accountability in government," Rep. Sanchez continued. "We already know from news reports that Vietnam continues to harass and imprison citizens who publicly criticize the Communist government. I fear nothing will change unless the U.S. and international communities take concrete action to punish Vietnam for its abuses."

Rep. Sanchez, who is the ranking female member on the House Armed Services Committee, was in Southeast Asia conducting military site visits and a security tour of the Philippines, Cambodia, Singapore, and Taiwan. While in Taiwan, she had the opportunity to meet with members of the Vietnamese Migrant Workers and Brides Office, a NGO that specifically addresses the issue of human trafficking in Vietnam. Rep. Sanchez also met with Taiwanese President Ma Ying-jeou to discuss the importance of U.S.-Taiwanese trade and security relations.

Throughout her time in Congress, Rep. Sanchez has been a strong and vocal advocate for religious freedom and social justice in Vietnam. Rep. Sanchez believes Vietnam's government must be held accountable for its human rights violations before viable economic relations can

be pursued and has urged the State Department to place Vietnam back on its Countries of Particular Concern (CPC) list. In March of 2009, Rep. Sanchez authored a bi-partisan letter to major internet service providers expressing concern regarding worsening internet restrictions in Vietnam. The Congresswoman urged these service providers to respect the privacy and free speech rights of the Vietnamese people by providing users with full and unobstructed internet access. She continues to call for the release of detained and imprisoned human rights and democracy advocates, including Tran Khai Than Thuy, Pham Thanh Nghien, and Le Thi Cong Nhan.

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